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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the findings of a national survey of 160 colleges and universities that explored facilities and services to students with orthopedic disabilities, including structural accessibility, academic accessibility, dorm-living, and recreational opportunities. Results of the survey indicate: (1) 10 percent of the institutions of higher education (IHEs) offer structural accessibility to students who have orthopedic disabilities; (2) 66 percent of the IHEs offer academic accessibility to students who have orthopedic disabilities; (3) 2 percent of the IHEs facilitate dorm-living for students who have orthopedic disabilities; (4) 31 percent of the IHEs offer recreational opportunities to students who have orthopedic disabilities; (5) 7 percent of the IHEs provide total or full accessibility to students who have orthopedic disabilities; (6) overall, public IHEs offer more accessibility in all areas than private institutions; (7) the size of an IHE has nothing to do with its structural accessibility; (8) the larger the size of the IHE, the greater is its academic accessibility; (9) there is no relationship between the geographic region and institutional accessibility; and (10) academic accessibility provided by the IHEs was significantly greater than any other type of accessibility. (CR)

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Transition to Post-Secondary Environments

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Transition to Post-Secondary Environments

Abstract

This presentation reports the findings of a national survey that collected data describing the selected facilities and services of a random sample of US universities and colleges. The findings are discussed with implications for practice and research.

Transition to Post-Secondary Environments

Individuals with disabilities are a valuable resource. However, in our society, their human potential still needs to be fully recognized, nurtured, and developed. The fullest realization of their potential requires investment of time and effort. It requires educational programs that are designed to allow them pursue various avenues to reach their individual goals (Stilington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

It is gratifying to know that as a society we admit that our responsibility towards individuals with disabilities does not end with the culmination of high school. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, PL 101-476) identifies postsecondary education and vocational training as transition outcomes. However, research shows that high school graduates with disabilities are much less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education programs than their non-disabled counterparts. Fairweather and Shaver (1991) have reported that only 21 percent of the students with disabilities attend postsecondary institutions as compared to 64 percent of the non-disabled learners.

Further, the participation of students with disabilities in postsecondary education varies by type of disability. The students with visual disabilities constitute 43 percent of the postsecondary population with disabilities; the students with learning disabilities represent 17 percent, students with mental retardation 6 percent, students with emotional disturbance 12 percent, and students with orthopedic disabilities 29 percent (Fair-weather & Shaver, 1991).

The immersion into a university environment can have life long benefits for individuals with disabilities (Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995). However, for successful outcomes, it is

important to consider the availability and quality of post-secondary environments. There is sufficient anecdotal evidence to support the assertion that some institutions tend to be more "friendly" for students with disabilities than others. The present study was conducted to meet the pressing needs of current knowledge base. It collected data on selected facilities and services of 137 universities and colleges. The study addressed the following specific research questions:

1. To what extent do institutions of higher learning offer structural accessibility to students with orthopedic disabilities?

2. To what extent do institutions of higher learning provide academic accessibility to students with orthopedic disabilities?

3. To what extent do institutions of higher learning facilitate dorm living for students with orthopedic disabilities?

4. To what extent do institutions of higher learning enhance recreational opportunities for students with orthopedic disabilities?

5. Do institutions of higher learning differ in accessibility (structural, academic, and residential) on the basis of size, type (private vs. public) geographic region, and level at which the institution offers academic degrees?

Methodology

This section discusses the sample, the instrument and research procedures. Each one is described in a separate segment below.

Sample

The sample consisted of 300 institutions of higher learning (N=300). The names of participating institutions were randomly selected from a pool of 1,500 institutions of higher learning, listed in the Right College, a widely used guide to higher education. A table of random numbers was used for the purposes of sample selection.

Instrument

The data were gathered with a questionnaire, entitled, "Higher Education Survey". The questionnaire was developed by the principal investigator and modified according to the results of a pilot study. The questionnaire contains 33 Likert type items. The 33 items are categorized into four subscales: (1) Structural Accessibility; (2) Academic Accessibility; (3) Dorm-living; and (4) Recreational Opportunities. The total reliability of this questionnaire is .88 (Alpha).

Procedures

The names and addresses of participating institutions were obtained from the Right College, a guide to institutions of higher education. Directors of Services for Disabled Students at the selected institutions were also identified from the Right Guide. Three hundred Directors of selected universities and colleges were sent a cover letter along with the "Higher Education Survey". The Directors were informed about the purpose of the study. A stamped and pre-addressed return envelope was also enclosed to facilitate the responses.

Approximately three weeks after the initial mailing, a postcard was sent to each of the Directors. It served as a thank you note for those who had responded and a gentle reminder for those who had not.

Approximately two weeks after the first follow up, another letter was sent to the non-respondents. The follow-ups were sent to increase the response rate. A total of 160 responses, that is 53.3 percent of the mailed questionnaires were completed and returned. Data collection was concluded in approximately 8 weeks.

Results

The data were analyzed to address the research questions. The results are discussed below and their order corresponds with the order of research questions listed earlier in this paper.

- As shown in Figure 1, approximately 10% (n=160) of the institutions of higher learning offer structural accessibility, as defined by this study, to the students who have orthopedic disabilities.
- As shown in Figure 2, approximately 66% (n=160) of the institutions of higher learning offer academic accessibility, as defined by this study, to the students who have orthopedic disabilities.
- As shown in Figure 3, approximately 2% (n=160) of the institutions of higher learning facilitate dorm living for students who have orthopedic disabilities.
- As shown in Figure 4, approximately 31% (n=160) of the institutions of higher learning offer recreational opportunities for their students who have orthopedic disabilities.
- As shown in Figure 5, approximately 7% (n=160) of the institutions of higher learning provide total or full accessibility as defined by this study to the students who have orthopedic disabilities.
- Overall, public institutions of higher learning offer more accessibility in all areas than private institutions.
- Size of an institution of higher learning has nothing to do with its structural accessibility.
- There is a significant relationship between the size of an institution and its academic accessibility. The larger the size of an institution, the greater is its academic

accessibility. Overall, institutions with graduate programs offer more accessibility in all areas investigated by this study than institutions without graduate programs.

- There is no relationship between the geographic region and institutional accessibility, as defined by this study.
- Academic accessibility provided by institutions of higher learning is significantly greater than any other type of accessibility investigated by this study.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution because of the following limitations. First, it is likely that the non-responding institutions are different in accessibilty from the institutions that responded. Second, accessibility is a broad term. It can be defined and measured in different ways. There are no standard criteria to measure the different kinds of accessibility that this study investigated. Third, it is likely that the students with orthopedic disabilities may have different perceptions about the accessibility of their institutions.

For a complete view of the various types of accessibility of institutions of higher learning, the institutional accessibility should be evaluated by the students with orthopedic disabilities themselves. There is a need to replicate this study with a sample of students who have orthopedic disabilities and are enrolled in institutions of higher learning. Although, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandates structural accessibility, it is not always easy to create it. And as Rusch, Destefano, Chadsey-Rusch, Phelps, and Szymanski (1992) have ascertained, barriers to accessibility reflect not individual but societal problems. Youths with disabilities now have a statutory right to expect their education and training to prepare them for employment and independent living.

Institutions of Higher Learning
(n=160)

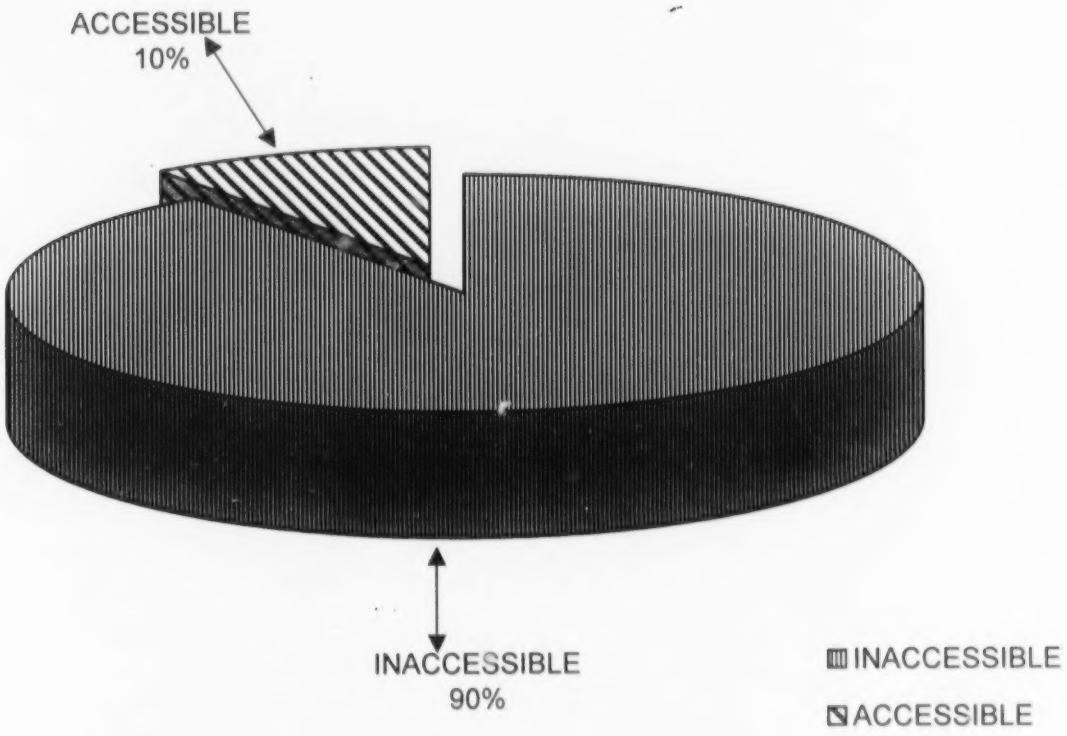

Figure 1. Structural Accessibility

Institutions of Higher Learning
(n=160)

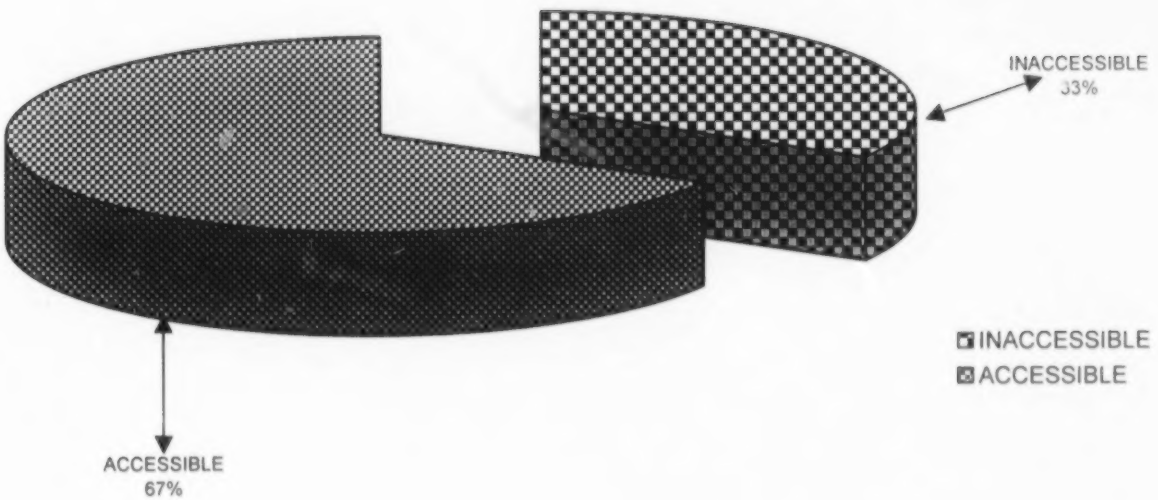

Figure 2. Academic Accessibility

Institutions of Higher Learning (n = 160)

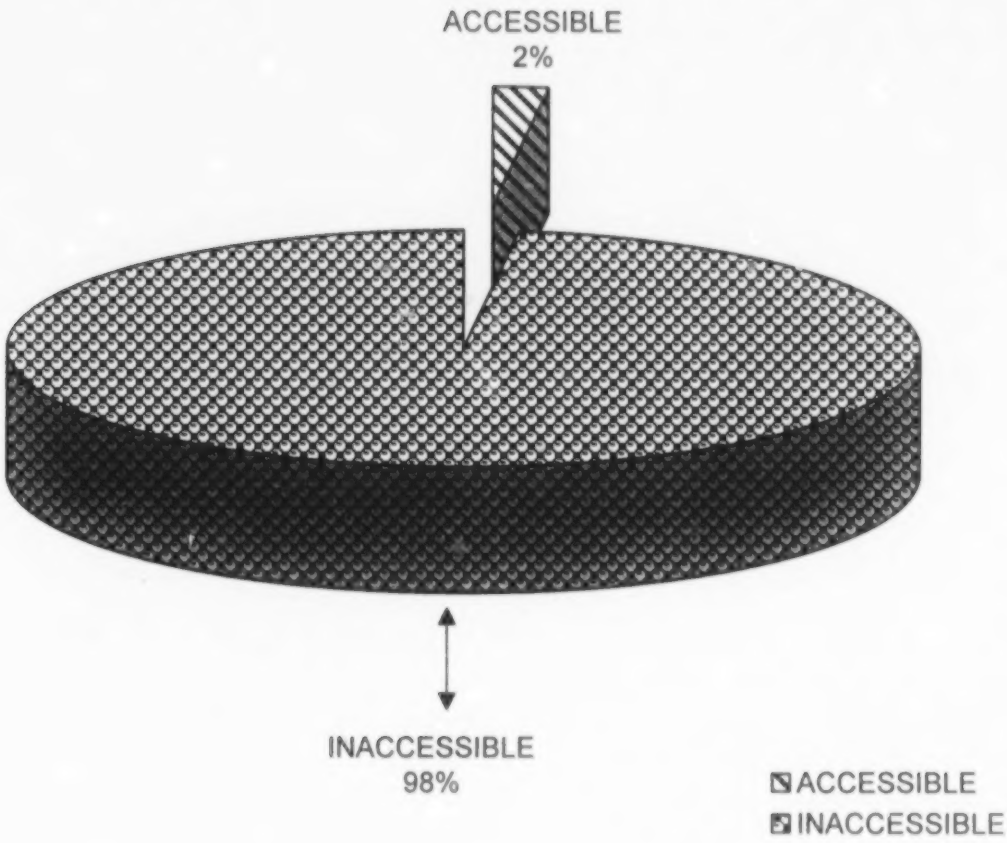

Figure 3. Dorm Living

Institutions of Higher Learning
(n=160)

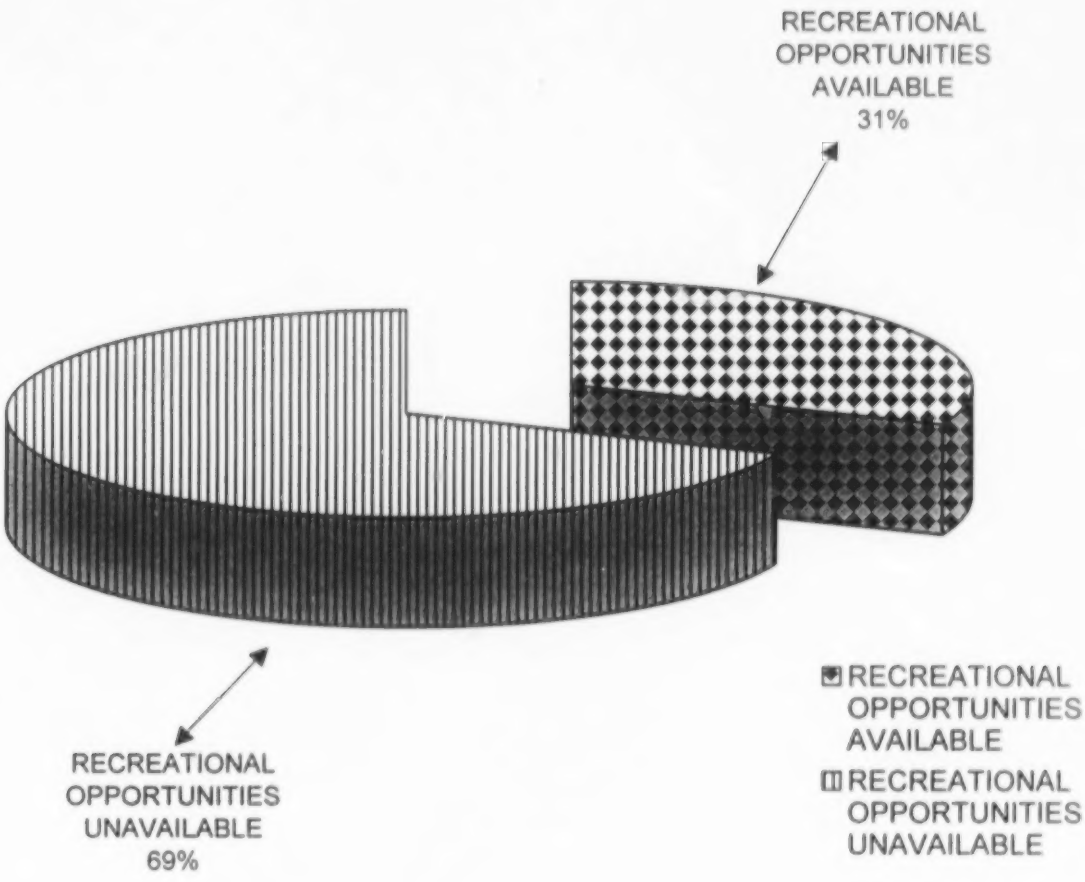

Figure 4. Recreational Opportunities

Institutions of Higher Learning (n = 160)

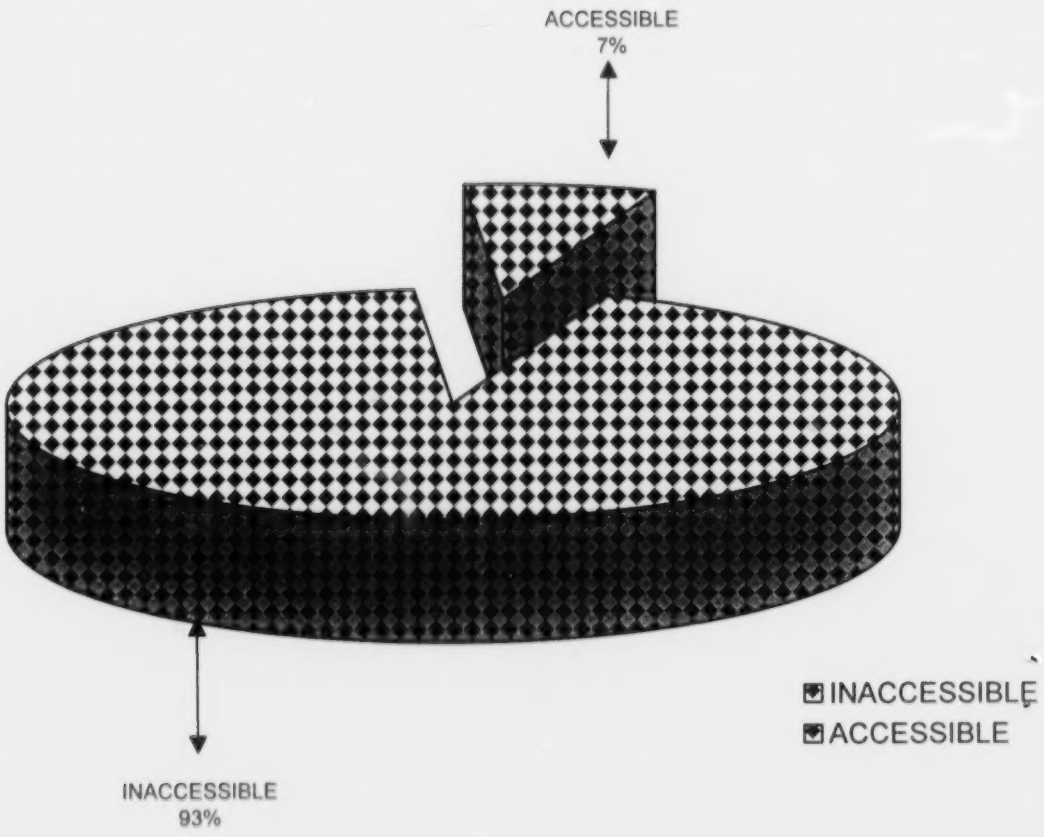

Figure 5. Total Accessibilty

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